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PROGRAM The Diane Rehm Show

STATION WAMU-FM  
NPR Network

DATE January 8, 1986 10:05 A.M. CITY Washington, D.C.

SUBJECT Central America

DIANE REHM: The conflicts in Central America are continually in the news and on the minds of Washington officials. El Salvador's guerrillas are proving they can survive the attacks of a more efficient Salvadoran Army. Through sabotage, the country's various rebel groups inflicted an estimated \$200 million in damage last year. And last week Colombia's Foreign Minister announced that weapons once the property of Nicaragua's defeated National Guard had been found in the wreckage of the guerrilla attack on the Palace of Justice. American officials have suggested that Nicaragua was involved in supplying weapons to the assailants of last November's massacre.

From the U.S. Government standpoint, aid to the Nicaraguan rebels and El Salvador security forces is necessary to combat the spread of communism. But there's another voice that's not being heard. According to David McMichael, a senior research fellow at the Council on Hemispheric Affairs, the Contadora Central American peace program deserves serious consideration. Mr. McMichael was an intelligence analyst with the CIA from 1981 to 1983. He's here in the studio with me this morning. And we'll take your calls between now and about 10:35.

It's good to meet you.

DAVID MCMICHAEL: Nice to meet you, Diane.

REHM: You said in an article you wrote recently for the Baltimore Sun that the Central American problem is a U.S. problem, defined and structured in U.S. terms, with the debate aimed at this country's domestic and foreign policy constituencies. I wonder if you'd expand on that.

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MCMICHAEL: Yeah. This is fairly traditional, as you know, in American foreign policy toward Central America, is the determination to define the issues in terms of U.S. interests. And there's no denying that there is a revolutionary situation in Central America. There are basic causes for this. And one of the main factors to consider is, you know, counter to the point made in the now-almost-forgotten Kissinger Report, that this is a result of U.S. neglect.

I think too few people recall that the United States has been the controlling factor in Central America for well over a hundred years, economically and politically and militarily. And many of the decisions as to what Central America is have been the result of deliberate American policy.

And this being the case, there's always been a tendency to feel that, well, we have to control what goes on there. And since the rationale has traditionally been that this is essential for U.S. security, we find the same arguments being advanced today that were advanced almost a hundred years ago, long before the Soviet Union existed. And they've been repeated in the period of the First World War, when the Germans were the menace; in the 1920s, when Bolshevik Mexico was supposedly the menace, and so forth.

REHM: So you're suggesting, rather than neglect, we have been overactive in the area; and this, in fact, has brought us to the point we find ourselves in now.

MCMICHAEL: Oh, yes. And I think, Diane, one of the things that strikes one when one spends time there and talks to a lot of people is the sense that -- the extent to which this has been internalized by many people, particularly the middle class, in Central America: the idea that the United States does control what goes on there and that they are waiting, in a sense, for a U.S. solution. And this, of course, leads to a tremendous amount of political immaturity in the region and political contests which have very little to do with the situation within the country, but in seeking the favor and support of the United States.

REHM: Help me to understand what kind of alternatives are actually being put forth by the Contadora peace group.

MCMICHAEL: Yeah. Well, I -- you know, as you introduced me, you said that we should give more attention to it. At this point, I'm really very pessimistic that anything will be done, as reference Mr. Shultz's statement. So when we talk about paying attention to Contadora, I'm almost at the point of saying, well, what we should really do is plan to give it at least a decent burial.

But what Contadora provided, and a marvelous historic opportunity which I think has been wasted, was to have the Central American problem, as you will, defined in regional terms by those countries which would most likely be affected by changes in Central America. And these countries were Mexico, Venezuela, Columbia and Panama.

REHM: What does it mean to define the problem in regional terms?

MCMICHAEL: Well, what it means is to say, look, that the problems within the region are those social, economic, political problems which are innate in the region. It is not an area of East-West conflict.

This, I think, has been the basis of the wrong turn taken and emphasized, especially since the Carter Administration came in in 1981, has been to declare that this is an area where the Soviet Union is making a major challenge.

REHM: But there has been some realistic concern about communist infiltration and...

MCMICHAEL: Oh sure. Look, you know, I guess there's a difference with the extent of realism and the concern. Certainly there has been concern. Much of it has not been realistic, and some has been realistic.

A lot has to do with the fact that these are very poor countries down there. There's no denying that. And the changes that have come over the last 20-plus years have been what people have described as growth without development, a condition in which while the national economies typically grew from 1960, roughly, to the late 1970s, the impoverishment of masses of people has also continued. It's been a very unbalanced sort of situation.

This has been described to the people down there as living in democratic free-market societies. So it's not too surprising to me that those who find this very unsatisfactory define their solutions in terms of Marxist, non-free-market, controlled economic societies. And one can define this as communism, and I suppose it's legitimate to do so. But whether one defines it as the development of a serious Soviet control in the area is something else.

REHM: Can you see that some of the options put forth by the Contadora Group actually had the possibility of coming to some fruition had there been agreement on the part of the U.S.?

MCMICHAEL: Oh, yes. I think not only the possibility,

but the probability. The whole idea, of course, was to neutralize Central America, declare it a region off limits to both the Soviet Union and to the United States, especially militarily. That accounts for the prohibition on military bases of any foreign nature within the region, foreign military maneuvers of any sort within the region; a system to control the imports of arms, munitions, and so forth; and, of course, the strict prohibition on the support by any country within the region for, you know, guerrilla movements, counter-government movements. It was a status quo sort of solution.

And the fact that it was to be organized by countries within the region and to be supervised in a way which I think would have been very effective offered a great deal of promise. And at least -- and the best thing, of course, it would have done would have been to remove the United States as the immediate intervening power.

And as I said earlier, one of the -- to me, one of the key problems, if you will, in Central America has been the political immaturity which is encouraged by the idea of the inevitability of a U.S. intervention anytime anything happens within the country.

REHM: So, from your perspective, why has the U.S. been so in opposition to those proposals put forward by Contadora?

MCMICHAEL: Well, there are two reasons. One if the basic reason that it's very difficult to change a traditional foreign policy, a very traditional foreign policy of the United States carried out, as I said, under Administrations as various as those of Grover Cleveland, Dwight Eisenhower and Ronald Reagan, going back a long period of time.

The second reason, I think, most particularly at this time, was the determination by this Administration when it came into office to obliterate what they called the Vietnam syndrome and to identify the situation in Central America simply as a Soviet challenge. And I believe they honestly knew it was not a Soviet challenge. But because the power disparity of the United States was so great, it was assumed that the United States would be able to very rapidly impose its solution, particularly in the case of crushing the insurgency in El Salvador and overturning the Sandinista government in Nicaragua, and then declare this as a victory over the "Evil Empire."

REHM: And to do it in a fairly rapid fashion.

MCMICHAEL: Oh, yes. Yes. I believe it was assumed that this could be carried out in a very quick time. And of course, it has not been. It's been a terrible failure and it's

caused, you know, in its conduct, the deaths of thousands of people.

REHM: How much control does the U.S. have over the Contadora process?

MCMICHAEL: It has the control in a sense that if the United States, with all its power, says, as Mr. Shultz said, it will not observe it, it's going to be a dead letter. Just as years ago, when the Central American Court of Justice was set up shortly before the First World War, which was to adjudicate on the model of the World Court, which the United States has also walked away from, disputes among the Central American nations. When U.S. interests in Nicaragua, at that time, were threatened by decisions of the Central American Court of Justice, the U.S. announced it would not observe them. And that court disappeared. So that's a historical precedent.

REHM: David McMichael. He's a former CIA analyst and senior research fellow at the Council on Hemispheric Affairs. We are going to take your calls....

Mr. McMichael, you were one of the first CIA analysts in recent memory to make a public break with the agency. What were your responsibilities there, and why did you decide to leave?

MCMICHAEL: Well, I worked with the National Intelligence Council, the analytic group which was attached to that. And the National Intelligence Council, as you know, is the coordinating body for the whole intelligence community. And I was part of the small group that provided direct assistance to the Council in the writing of national intelligence estimates and general research for them.

I was there, as were all the members of that body, on a two-year contract. I was one of two or three people brought in from outside. Most of the others came from within the intelligence community. I had a background, from past contract work, with the agency and other defense and security-related organizations over a period of about 20 years.

When my two-year contract was over, I was not offered a renewal of it. My position on the question of the evidence on the so-called arms flow from Nicaragua to El Salvador was one I'd been arguing very strongly within the agency, and I can say that was the reason I was not offered a renewal.

Had I been offered one, I'll be very candid with you, I had a very good GS rating and was receiving a good salary, and I think I would have remained. And as a matter of fact, I know I would have. But once out, I had to make a decision as to whether this issue was still important enough to me that I was going to

work on it. And after a period of about a year, a year and a half, after some desultory attempts to work politically on it, I decided to work in the way I am.

REHM: Had you made your feelings about the use of the information about the transfer of arms known within the agency?

MCMICHAEL: Oh, yeah. Yeah, my position on that was well-known. I had argued it very hard. I simply could not accept, on the basis of the evidence that I dealt with, the conclusions that were reached about the so-called massive arms flow. Even given the most favorable, from the Administration point of view, interpretation to that evidence, there was absolutely nothing to support the hugely exaggerated statements, public statements, that the Administration made. Nothing.

REHM: What were the reactions from your superiors?

MCMICHAEL: Well, I had several conferences at quite high levels with people who assured me, well, no, there was -- you know, they just knew it. This was strong, the evidence was strong.

And I had access to everything. I will tell you, Diane, one of the things that really struck me was after a lunch meeting with a person who had done a very significant analytic piece on this, where I told him it was so weak that it could not support the conclusion, he got very angry with me, and I'll ever forget his words. He says, "Look," he says, "of course we don't have the kind of evidence that would convince the American Civil Liberties Union. But everybody knows those arms are going from Nicaragua to El Salvador."

And I told him, I said, "'Everybody knows' is not my idea of intelligence work."

REHM: That response, somehow, did not seem to make a difference. The response on your part did not seem to make a difference.

MCMICHAEL: Well, no. Look, it wouldn't have made any difference anyway. The Administration, from the beginning, as I told you earlier, had determined to define what is happening in Central America as a major Soviet challenge.

REHM: But can it be argued, Mr. McMichael, that, in fact, perhaps you were not privy to the kind of information that was truly used as the backbone, as the basis for these kinds of claims?

MCMICHAEL: Well, let me put it to you this way: That

is, of course, possible. And I'm trained as a historian, and my bottom line is, I could be wrong, you see. But when we face a situation in which the United States is expending vast amounts of monies and causing -- I can tell you this because I've seen them. I spent time in the combat zones there -- causing the deaths of thousands of people, vast destruction on the ground of evidence, so-called, it is not willing to display in such a place as the World Court, where the propaganda advantage, of course, is blowing completely away the credibility of the Nicaraguan government -- it's so obvious -- you say to yourself, what is this evidence? You know, what could it possibly disclose? You know, I simply can't accept that.

And then I say if it's shown that I'm wrong, well, I'll simply accept that and go to live in Tasmania, or someplace.

REHM: You testified against the U.S. at the World Court, in terms of its stance and its charges against Nicaragua.

MCMICHAEL: Well, no, I didn't testify against the United States. I testified at the World Court as to my opinion on the validity of the U.S. charges of the arms flow. And I stated my conclusions, I think, as clearly as I could under oath. And they're the same ones that I have advanced. Yes, there as certainly, in my view, evidence of Nicaraguan government involvement during that period from late 1980 through early 1981. And after that -- and this is one of the things that really convinced me, Diane-- that the type of evidence that was available at that time was very and it did certainly indicate involvement, at least at very high levels within Nicaragua's government. Whether it was a government decision or not, you could dicker about. But I think you'd have to say it was clear. That sort of evidence just disappeared afterwards.

So, why was it available once and not available later?  
I don't know.

REHM: I would imagine that your defection caused a good deal of consternation within the agency. And I heard you say earlier that your contract simply expired and the agency decided not to renew it. But aren't all CIA employees required to sign some kind of secrecy agreement when they join?

MCMICHAEL: Oh, yeah. Sure. And I signed it again going out. And everything that I have said relating to my period of service within the agency has been cleared through the agency's Publications Review Board. I don't go beyond that. I don't name the names of people I worked with. I don't refer to classified material which I've not been cleared to do.

And I will say this: The agency has been extremely

good, through the Publications Review Board, in clearing this expeditiously, you know, when I need it for publication. And only one occasion have they ever asked me not to state something publicly, which was for the safety of an individual.

REHM: So you're saying that the kind of secrecy agreement that you entered into with the CIA in no way hinders the work that you are doing now or the statements that you have made...

MCMICHAEL: Well, I am sure that if I were in violation of that regulation, I would be prosecuted. And I haven't been prosecuted.

REHM: All right. Let's open the phones....

Good morning.

MAN: I want to thank you very much for having Mr. McMichael. I saw him in Richmond, Virginia when he testified for some citizens who happen to be friends of mine who protested at Senator Tribble's office. And I just think he adds a note of clarity to an otherwise rather muddy issue.

My grandfather fought Sandino in Nicaragua, and I'd just hate to see history repeat itself.

REHM: Do you want to comment on that, Mr. McMichael.

MCMICHAEL: No, just to say thank you very much. I strive to bring clarity and I'm never absolutely certain whether I'm doing it or not.

REHM: Considering your views and your disagreement with those in the agency, I'm interested to hear you say that you would have been fine to stay on with the CIA had they offered to renew your contract. It sounds as though there was a fundamental disagreement, and yet you felt, somehow, you could continue to work there.

MCMICHAEL: Well, you have to look at this from several aspects, Diane. First of all, you know, I am 50-what, almost 58 years old now and I've been involved in this sort of thing ever since I began. I started as a professional soldier. I spent ten years in the United States Marine Corps. I went, when I left, resigned my commission there, did my graduate study. I took a bachelor's in history, in U.S. foreign policy, in Latin American history, taught that for some years. I went to a major research organization, worked on -- because of that combined military and academic background, worked on Defense Department studies and so forth off and on through the years, spent almost four years in



Southeast Asia as a counterinsurgency specialist.

And there have been many times when I have disagreed with the policy, you know. This is not a smart thing to do, but you've got sort of a split-screen. On the one hand, you're a technician who's working on it. Of course, in the intelligence field policy is supposed not to be your concern. Evidence is supposed to be your concern.

And from my perspective, working at the level that I was within the agency, I could tell myself, "Look, this is the place to keep challenging, because this can have an influence here."

All right. When I was out of there, I had to make a decision. Really for the first time in 30 years, I was completely on the outside. Well, I was still interested in the issue, and how was I going to work? And if I could challenge the evidence inside, I can challenge the evidence outside.

And, of course, now that I'm -- you know, the more I do this, it's becoming more and more clear to me that I've invested not only rationality in this, but a considerable amount of emotion too.

REHM: What kinds of responses have you received, not only from the CIA, with whom you say you have continued to cooperate within the bounds of the law, but what about the Hill? I mean how are your statements received, how do you personally feel about the reactions you've gotten?

MCMICHAEL: Well, I think, by and large, they've been -- you know, they've been very favorable. I've had many discussions with people on the Hill, some of whom very much oppose me and tell me I'm full of prunes, and others who are very unconvinced by the evidence, and have been for a very long time.

In a recent statement I made in the Washington Post, what I pointed out was the fact that Congress -- we do have a long history, and I don't think it's deniable, that both the Department of State and the Central Intelligence Agency do mislead, in the interest of continuing Administration policy, the Congress. Many congressmen are highly suspicious of this. But most congressmen, both in the Senate and the House, are very reluctant openly to challenge this once a foreign policy is established.

REHM: How do you evaluate or assess what's happening on the Hill now in relation to the Administration's call for additional aid to the Contras?

MCMICHAEL: Well, I think the battle in the Congress has

been pretty much lost. I think the floodgates were opened in June. I think the effect of continuing propaganda and the determination of the President, which amounts, in my view, to an obsession, had, very definitely had their effect. And certainly -- and I can tell you this too, Diane -- the Nicaraguan government over the past year has really made a decision, in my view, and from conversations I've had with the responsible people in that government, that they knew they were not going to win their struggle, as they see it, in the columns of United States newspapers or in the halls of the Congress of the United States. They had seen the way the vote had gone, even when there was a Boland Amendment which prohibited the use of the Contra funds for the purpose of destabilizing or overthrowing the Nicaraguan government. What a farce! You know, they saw that money expended and they knew what it was being expended for and they saw the action.

They said, "No. If we are going to win at all, we're going to win in the mountains, we're going to win in the barrios." And they really don't pay any attention right now to so-called public opinion in the United States.

And this has offended a lot of Congress people. And they say, "Well, they must -- they just must be very bad people." So they're going to vote these funds.

And I think it's gotten to a strong hardening of positions on both sides, and I think a very great tragedy is in offing.

REHM: Good morning.

WOMAN: I have two questions for your guest. One of them is -- and I have done some limited volunteer health-care work in both Central and South America. And most of the people that I was working with seem to be apolitical. They really didn't care so much who was in office -- and I'm speaking now of Honduras -- so much as they cared what the effects were. For example, did they get less money for education, for vaccinations, food, shelter, you know, building projects, bridges, etcetera?

I have heard several people say that if the United States put the amount of money into those sorts of almost subsistence types of, you know, need projects, that most of the problems in Central America would evaporate.

And I would like your guest's opinion on that.

MCMICHAEL: Well, I think, in the first part of your statement, that most people, almost anywhere, are apolitical, in the sense that they are content to go along with almost any sort

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of government which provides them with the necessities, and even the luxuries, of life. The better off you are, the better you like what's going on.

And certainly, I think there's much room for beneficial United States assistance in the area. But the final conclusion that the problems of the area would evaporate were there to be a sufficiently large United States aid program -- for example, the proposals of the Kissinger Report added up eventually to some 24 billions of dollars for Central America alone, more than was considered for the whole of Latin America during the Alliance for Progress days -- that these problems would evaporate, I'm sorry that I can't agree with you. The problems are very, very deep in structural there. And, you know, while certainly the improvement of life that could be caused by better programs would help, these deep problems will not go away. And Contadora won't solve them, either, I hasten to tell you.

REHM: Well, considering the fact that you said earlier that you think the death knell has tolled for Contadora, and considering the fact that the top Administration official has said that the alternatives are either to put military aid in there or walk away, what's your prognosis?

MCMICHAEL: Well, I'm afraid those are not the only options that have been put forward. They don't talk about walking away, and these people won't walk away. The other option they put forward -- and this is sort of an arm-twister they've used on the Congress, by the way, in the case of the Contra aid -- is, "Well, if we don't aid the Contras, we'll have to send in the Marines." They won't walk away.

So, I'm afraid that right now, more than at any time since the harbor mining crisis of almost two years ago, I am growing very pessimistic that those who have opposed the direct use of U.S. troops are losing the struggle.

And one of the reasons, Diane, that they're losing it is because the Contras have been militarily very ineffective and are on the verge of total defeat now. And I do not think that this Administration will emulate John Kennedy at the Bay of Pigs, when the Cuban brigade invading Cuba was defeated and Kennedy said, "No, we will not use U.S. force to retrieve the situation." I'm really concerned that the current Administration keeps that military option very much alive. They've said so. So I'm concerned about it. And I can tell you the Nicaraguans are concerned about it.

REHM: Considering the current furor over terrorism in this world and the turning of attention towards Libya and the imposition of economic sanctions, things have a way of shifting

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in their intensity, moving stories from the first page into the back pages. I wonder whether you see that kind of shift, perhaps, in the offing right now in regard to Central America.

MCMICHAEL: Well, that's entirely possible. Once again, this Administration has a global view, of course, and a tendency to run off in all directions. But we can also remember that it was this at the time of the major U.S., the last major U.S. concern for an intervention in the Middle East, in Lebanon, the events there, that immediately following on that was the invasion of Grenada. So things go change in the blink of an eye.

REHM: Good morning.

MAN: I am a Nicaraguan citizen, you know, and I am living here in the United States. And I am very surprised about the sort of perception that you have about Nicaragua, especially about the Nicaraguan government.

He says that he has heard that the Sandinista government is going to win the struggle in the mountains and in the barrios. I think it's important for them to win the struggle over there because it's a very, very repressive regime, and all the Nicaragua people feel a sort of hostage of that government.

We don't care about communism or democracy whatsoever. It's an inefficient, repressive and criminal regime, what we're having there. We are sort of hostage of that regime, you know. That regime is very popular in some sectors, some sectors who don't favor our cause. But we know that the truth will prevail pretty soon, and we hope that Nicaragua will be free from those guys pretty soon.

That's all. Thank you.

REHM: All right, sir. Thanks for your call.

MCMICHAEL: Well, you've your point of view there. And as a Nicaraguan citizen, I know that -- you being a Nicaraguan citizen, not I, of course -- you have an option to express that. And I'm not going to debate your view of the Nicaraguan regime with you.

My concern is with the United States policy which is killing many, many hundreds of your fellow citizens.

REHM: All right. We'll take one last call.

WOMAN: I would like to ask your guest about a thing I saw in Jack Anderson's column the other day in connection with the Contra regime there. Is there some involvement of the

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Moonies and General Singlaub behind the Contras? Did he read that?

MCMICHAEL: Oh, yes. General Singlaub is very closely attached to the political wing of the Moonie movement, which is called CAUSA (?). General Singlaub, as you know, was formerly the commander of United States forces in Korea and made connections at that time with these groups. And CAUSA is very active in...

WOMAN: Nicaragua.

MCMICHAEL: Well, with the Contras and with groups in several other countries, particularly in Honduras and Uruguay. And yes.

WOMAN: Is it true they're supplying them with money and arms?

MCMICHAEL: Oh, yes. No doubt about it.

WOMAN: The Contras? So it isn't just the U.S. Government.

MCMICHAEL: Oh, no. There's -- I can't speak knowledgeably of all the channels through which this stuff flows. But take my word for it, you know, were it not for the approval and assistance of the United States Government, there would be no channels through which it could flow.

REHM: Thanks so much for your call.

David McMichael. He's a former CIA analyst and now senior research fellow at the Council on Hemispheric Affairs.